

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SCCT-01 SY-04 NIC-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5397

AMCONSUL CIUDAD JUAREZ UNN

AMCONSUL GUADALAJARA UNN

AMCONSUL HERMOSILLO UNN

AMCONSUL MATAMOROS UNN

AMCONSUL MAZATLAN UNN

AMCONSUL MERIDA UNN

AMCONSUL MONTERREY UNN

AMCONSUL NUEVO LAREDO UNN

AMCONSUL TIJUANA UNN

C O N F I D E N T I A L MEXICO 10772

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, MX

SUBJECT: TREND OF TERRORISM IN MEXICO

REF: A. MEXICO 7855; B. MEXICO 7696; C. MEXICO 10256

BEGIN SUMMARY: NEWS THAT A RANSOM PAYMENT PLAYED A ROLE IN THE RELEASE OF SENATOR RUBEN FIGUEROA, TOGETHER WITH THE GOM'S HANDLING OF TWO OTHER CASES AND WITH THE RECENT TREND OF EVENTS IN OTHER TERRORIST ACTIVITY, LEAD US TO SPECULATE THAT GOM MAY HAVE FOUND A PECULIARLY MEXICAN FORMULA FOR DISCOURAGING POLITICAL KIDNAPPINGS, BUT WITH THE RESULT OF FORCING TERRORISM IN OTHER DIRECTIONS.
END SUMMARY.

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1. BURIED IN A DEC. 22 POLITICAL COLUMN IN THE MEXICO

CITY DAILY EL UNIVERSAL WAS A REPORT THAT SENATOR RUBEN FIGUEROA TOLD REPORTERS TWENTY-FIVE MILLION PESOS (TWO MILLION DOLLARS) RANSOM WAS PAID FOR HIS RELEASE. ACCORDING TO WHAT FIGUEROA ALLEGEDLY SAID, A SECOND TWENTY-FIVE MILLION PESOS PAYMENT WAS TO BE MADE, BUT WAS OVERTAKEN BY THE EVENT OF HIS RELEASE. REPORT DOES NOT MAKE CLEAR WHO PAID RANSOM.

2. COMMENT: FIGUEROA'S ALLEGED STATEMENT DOES NOT LITERALLY CONTRADICT THE GOM VERSION OF HIS RELEASE, WHICH NEVER ADDRESS THE QUESTION OF RANSOM. HOWEVER, IT DOES CONTRADICT STATEMENTS MADE BY FIGUEROA'S FAMILY AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE MEXICAN TRUCKERS UNION, AND IT DOES CONTRADICT THE IMPRESSION LEFT BY THE OFFICIAL GOM VERSION, WHICH WAS THAT FIGUEROA'S RELEASE WAS DUE ENTIRELY TO THE MEXICAN ARMY'S ACTION IN "LIBERATING" HIM. THE STORY IS EMBARRASSING THEREFORE AND WE SUSPECT IT WILL BE IGNORED OFFICIALLY, OR, IF IT GETS MORE ATTENTION THAN IT HAS THUS FAR, NIED.# WE DOUBT, HOWEVER, ANY PAPER WOULD PRINT SUCH A STORY UNLESS FIGUEROA IN FACT DID MAKE SUCH A STATEMENT.

ASSUMING FIGUEROA DID MAKE THE STATEMENT, AND THAT IT IS TRUE -- A REPORT (REF B, PARA 4) THAT THE TRUCKERS UNION WAS SAID BY ONE SOURCE TO HAVE PAID A RANSOM OF THIS AMOUNT LENDS CREDENCE -- THE QUESTION THEN BECOMES WHAT TO MAKE OF THE GOM VERSION.

IT IS HELPFUL TO RECALL THAT IN THE LAST FIFTEEN MONTHS THE MAJOR POLITICAL FIGURES WHO HAVE BEEN KIDNAPPED (ZUNO, FIGUEROA, ANTHONY DUNCAN WILLIAMS) HAVE BEEN RELEASED UNHARMED, WHEREAS THE VICTIMS OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR (ARANGUEREN, MARGARET SAAD) HAVE BEEN MURDERED. IN BOTH THE ARANGUEREN AND SAAD CASES, RANSOM REPORTEDLY WAS PAID; THUS COMPLIANCE WITH KIDNAPPERS' DEMANDS DOES NOT ASSURE RELEASE OF THE VICTIM.

FOLLOWING THE SAME LOGIC, WE DOUBT THAT THE SUCCESS-
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FUL CONCLUSIONS OF THE CASES IN WHICH THE GOM WAS THE RECIPIENT OF TERRORIST DEMANDS WERE THE RESULTS OF THE GOM PRIVATELY ACCEDING TO THOSE DEMANDS. RATHER, WE THINK THE GOM IS WILLING TO PLAY AS ROUGHT A GAME AS THE TERRORISTS, AND EMPLOYS A PRAGMATIC POLICY DESIGNED TO OBTAIN RELEASE OF HOSTAGES, BUT IN SUCH A WAY AS TO DISCOURAGE FUTURE KIDNAPPINGS. THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THESE TWO GOALS IS RESOLVED BY THE GOM BEING ABLE TO ACT EVEN

IN VIOLATION OF ITS OWN LAWS, WITHOUT FEAR OF PUBLIC CRITICISM.

THIS TENTATIVE CONCLUSION IS SUPPORTED BY THE GOM HANDLING OF THE TORRES ENRIQUEZ CASE (REF C) DEC. 5, IN WHICH A GOM DECEPTION WAS THE KEY TO THE RELEASE OF HOSTAGES AND THE CAPTURE OF TORRES. IT IS SUPPORTED ALSO BY A REPORT THAT IN THE ZUNO CASE THE GOM WON ZUNO'S SAFE RELEASE BY THREATENING THE LIVES OF IMPRISONED TERRORISTS AND THEIR FAMILIES (SEE HMM-13,726).

THUS, IN THE FIGUEROA CASE, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT KNOWLEDGE THAT A RANSOM PAYMENT WAS MADE ALONE IS REASON TO DENY THE KEY ELEMENT OF THE GOM VERSION OF FIGUEROA'S RELEASE, THAT A GUN BATTLE BETWEEN THE MEXICAN ARMY AND THE CABANAS GROUP TOOK PLACE. BUT, GIVEN WHAT WE KNOW OF THE WAY IN WHICH THE TORRES ENRIQUEZ AND ZUNO CASES WERE HANDLED, WE DO SUSPECT THAT A RANSOM PAYMENT SOMEHOW CONTRIBUTED TO FIGUEROA'S SAFE RELEASE AND TO THE ARMY'S MIRACULOUSLY SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF ITS ASSIGNED MISSION. A POSSIBLE SCENARIO IS THAT THE ARMY SIMPLY AMBUSHED THE CABANAS GROUP AS SOON AS FIGUEROA WAS EXCHANGED FOR THE RANSOM PAYMENT. THUS, DESPITE THE FACT THAT A RANSOM WAS PAID, THE GOM IS BY NO MEANS DEPARTING FROM ITS TOUGH POLICY ON POLITICAL KIDNAPPINGS. PAYMENT OF RANSOM IS SIMPLY ONE TACTIC THE GOM MAY USE WHEN THE CIRCUMSTANCES WARRANT.

IF THE FOREGOING IS CORRECT, MEXICAN GUERRILLA GROUPS MAY EVENTUALLY CONCLUDE THAT A GOVERNMENT WHICH REFUSES TO BE BOUND BY CONSTITUTIONAL LIMITATIONS IS IN TOO STRONG A POSITION FOR POLITICAL KIDNAPPINGS TO SUCCEED (ALTHOUGH RELEASE OF IMPRISONED COMPATRIOTS AND PUBLICITY WILL CONTINUE TO BE POWERFUL INCENTIVES). WHEN THE MOTIVE

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IS SIMPLY FINANCING, GUERRILLA GROUPS MAY STOP KIDNAPPINGS OF PRIVATE PERSONS. WHEN THE OBJECTIVE IS MORE GENERAL -- TO PROVOKE LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO MAINTAIN ORDER -- THESE GROUPS MAY TURN TO OTHER FORMS OF TERRORISM, SUCH AS THE RECENT BOMBINGS IN MEXICO CITY. JOVA

NOTE BY OCT: # AS RECEIVED.

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